

THE DARK BREED

F. R. HIGGINS

THE DARK BREED

By the same Author

ISLAND BLOOD (1925)

THE DARK BREED

A BOOK OF POEMS

By
F. R. HIGGINS

As offspring of a little clan,
I make this song on Connacht men

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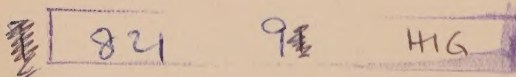
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A PETITION

*Sword reaper over many a trembling sea,
O Gran Uaile, sword handle to our verse—
Whose bounty is not base while in your purse
That bay of green isles glitter.*

*Unroll your lengthy purse to holy men
And for our succour give, O red-haired queen,
Still woods for vesper-time and tides of wine
To lift our psalter-singing ;*

*And may strange moonlight never stroke your hair
Nor rake your hearthstone with its crazy coal,
But may the black sea fall on him who stole
The blessing from your holy water.*

*For you I wet this verse with blessing, then
Unroll your lengthy purse to holy men !*

THE DARK BREED

WITH those bawneen men I'm one,
In the grey dusk-fall,
Watching the Galway land
Sink down in distress—
With dark men, talking of grass,
By a loose stone wall,
In murmurs drifting and drifting
To loneliness.

Over this loneliness,
Wild riders gather their fill
Of talking on beasts and on fields
Too lean for a plough,
Until, more grey than the grey air,
Song drips from a still,
Through poteen, reeling the dancing—
Ebbing the grief now!

Just, bred from the cold lean rock,
Those fellows have grown;
And only in that grey fire
Their lonely days pass
To dreams of far clovers
And cream-gathering heifers, alone
Under the hazels of moon-lighters,
Clearing the grass.

Again in the darkness,
Dull knives we may secretly grease,
And talk of blown horns on clovers
Where graziers have lain;
But there rolls the mist,
With sails pulling wind from the seas—
No bullion can brighten that mist,
O brood of lost Spain.

So we, with the last dark men,
Left on the rock grass,
May brazen grey loneliness
Over a poteen still
Or crowd on the bare chapel floor
Hearing late Mass,
To loosen that hunger
Broken land never can fill.

THE SPANISH MAN

As my lady was in her daisy garden,
The salt tide rose by her garden wall;
O, the salt tide rose by her river garden
And quiet was my love's footfall.

Where the sea flows over the full fresh water,
My love I saw under still boughs;
And swimming my boat on that tidal river,
I took my moorings by her greenhouse.

There were many ladies along the Claddagh
Taking air by each garden tree—
All taking air in that early evening
And none so quiet as my lady.

I stepped beside her most entertaining,
Making fine talk on that rounded sea;
But O she said: " You, I cannot marry,
For a Spanish man said bravely to me:

' O be my lady and in Limerick laces
Your delicate ways shall airily pass,
With quiet feet in your blue pampooties
And guinea-hens on the daisy grass.'"

Then her father came with that Spanish stranger
And led my love from her garden tree—
O, they led my love from her daisy garden,
As if I were of no quality.

So I'm wandering now with a foreign navy;
For love is a pleasure when fresh and new,
But growing older, it wants one bolder
And it slips away like the garden dew.

HERESY

WHAT peace have I in holy bonds,
From chiselled holiness on stone,
Where croziers, flowering in white bronze,
And fiery minds have finely shown
The grace of God in metal?

So when the quiet shoes my feet
And this hill-pool has cupped the moon,
I'll lie with God and slowly beat
My lonely thought into a tune,
That we may chant together.

Unravelling no gilded prayer,
I'll praise the Scribe, whose burning lines,
On that pure vellum of blue air,
Shoot crimson stars through golden signs
Around the flaming spiral;

And safe beneath those fiery snakes,
His breviary of sleep I'll tell,
Until the shining morning shakes
This calm hill to a laughing bell
And leads the day with singing.

THE FAIR OF MAAM

PURSUING my love's wild heart
From rumours through many a fair,
I roved under miles of pinewood
Through days of blue dusk air;
To meet the fair day at Maam
To gather sly rumours of her,
I took the pinewoods for my bed
And slept until dawn made a stir.

The stir of heifers and young bulls
Had hoofed soil under the pine,
Through fresh woods smelling of cattle,
Through dawn airs, moistured and fine;
And I, at a heel of soft herds,
Stepped from the heavy air
To a green square, gabled with pinewoods—
The fair-green of Maam fair.

All day in the slapping of bargains
I sought for word of my love;
And what had crowded my hearing,
But loud strokes herding each drove,
Horns buckling by bullocks unnozzled;
Strong words of praise or blame
Were heard from sly ass dealers—
But never my love's name!

And evening crowded the pinewoods
When all but my love were seen;
For hearing a reel of fife music
Rise on the loose fair-green,
Girls hurried from under green timbers
To dancers grown lively in ale,
To matchmakers, by the bone-fire,
That welded the female to male.

Then leaving the fair-green of Maam
The ballad-men sang my love
Until the glens whispered her name
That hill voices whispered above;
The pools of sunrise had not wet her,
So I crept where the moonlight creeps
To look on the unknown mountains
And plunder their blue deeps.

I've lost her, O loved one, O strange one,
O hunger none other can ease;
Crossroads of the Black Bull deceived me,
Courtyards by the eastern seas;
Grown peevish, I'm beggared in Maam,
Its woods are all gone and its fair
Is a memory left to the old men
Who tether a few goats there.

THE LITTLE CLAN

OVER their edge of earth
They wearily tread,
Leaving the stone-grey dew—
The hungry grass;
Most proud in their own defeat,
These last men pass
This labouring grass that bears them
Little bread.

Too full their spring tide flowed,
And ebbing then
Has left each hooker deep
Within salt grass;
All ebbs, yet lives in their song;
Song shall not pass
With these most desperate,
Most noble men!

Then, comfort your own sorrow;
Time has heard
One groping singer hold
A burning face;
You mourn no living Troy,
Then mourn no less
The living glory of
Each Gaelic word!

R A I N

AMONG those bushy spaces
The grey rain drowns the wind,
Flowing from airy places,
Flowing from hills behind
Her threshold, hushed in grasses;
And now her window-pane
Is caged in brambles casing
The half-light of the rain.
But she has left those grasses,
Then why should I look on
An evening gloss of waters
Without the cloud-blown swan,
Knowing in airy places
The grey rain cannot blur
Those shining airs—the graces
Remembered of her.

THE BALLAD OF O'BRUADIR

WHEN Captain O'Bruadir shook a sword across the sea,
Rolling glory on the water,

I had a mind O'Bruadir would make an earl of me,
Rolling glory on the water ;

So I shut my eyes on women, forgot their sturdy hips,
And yet I stuffed my 'kerchief by playing on their lips,
While skirting by the brambles, I quickly took to ships,
Rolling glory on the water !

Then out went knife and cutlass, blunderbuss and gun,
Rolling glory on the water ;

With boarding and with broadside we made the
Dutchmen run,
Rolling glory on the water ;

And down among the captains in their green skin shoes,
I sought for Hugh O'Bruadir and got but little news
Till I shook him by the hand in the bay of Santa Cruz,
Rolling glory on the water.

O'Bruadir said kindly, " You're a fresh blade from
Mayo,
Rolling glory on the water,

But come among my captains, to Achill back we go,
Rolling glory on the water ;

Although those Spanish beauties are dark and not so
dear,
I'd rather taste in Mayo, with April on the year,
One bracing virgin female; so swing your canvas here,
Rolling glory on the water! "

He gripped hands with a stranger, who said " I'd
rather grip
O'Bruadir in glory on the water."
" Well I'm your man," said Bruadir, " and you're
aboard my ship
Rolling glory on the water."

They drank to wilder friendship in ocean roguery;
They went ashore together, and between you and me
We found O'Bruadir dangling within an airy tree,
Ghosting glory from the water!

HERMITS

FRESH in wild holiness over
Each glittering mile,
And green with the blessings of Cellach,
There lies an isle,
Foundered on its own shadow
Of brambles and grass—
Its salvage of brambles still bending,
Where saints sang the Mass;
Yet healing of sleep and the quiet
Of wells still are there,
With cold rushes telling their beads
On stones of dumb prayer!

Lay oars to the thole pins, O row there;
These townlands of men
Are hedged from the quiet that even
Nods a lake hen;
From under their hills of blackthorn,
Come and row;
From under close branches, on waters
Grown blue with the sloe;
And away, when a day moon is fooling
The full birds home,
We'll pull until sunset has dropped
To luminous foam.

O would we could land on that island
And gather its calm
Into our wild hearts in a twilight
Of candle and psalm;
Watching the ebb of old waters—
And with a new flood,
The salt of your shining beauty
Stinging my blood!
Then what if cold Death is growing
Deep in each bone,
Love cannot end with two ashes
Under one stone.

THE EMBLEM

ONE willow bends
Above the moving water,
One willow bends
And lifts each tip half dry;
Too pale and slim
To leave a single shadow
It leans and merely measures
The water passing by.

It holds no grace
Of April on the water;
It holds no grace
Upon the growing air;
Too frail for leaf,
Too slim for dew upon it,
Nor could an airy linnet
Light on it anywhere.

As not of earth,
Lost light on water lingers;
As not of earth,
Each willow wand grows dim;
Dusk has no stir;
And calm on hilly spaces
The moon, for other grasses,
Is half a silver rim.

One pale hand bends
A frail sprig from that willow;
One pale hand bends
And then the form goes by;
So frail a sprig,
And yet what sorrow on it,
While in her mourning bonnet
She wears it with a sigh!

THE GRIEF

It is my fill of sorrow among the black glens,
That stript of light I grope through days gone blind;
Ah, Muiris, you are the grief that wandered my voice
And left me with this broken mind.

You walked the blue mountains in an air of stars,
While the cuckoos barked before you to dawn-rise;
But, Muiris O'Ruane, I have taken my death
In the love you gave me then with dark lies.

In your step I saw no darkness and so I left
The sun by one green gable of a pine wood,
And broke sour nuts of wisdom on a sweet tooth
With you who quenched my girlhood.

This time, with the falling of sap, they cut the white-
thorn;
And now, Muiris, my own sister cuts down my life—
O she, that dark looker by this window of tears,
Breaks twin-bone and branch and is your wife!

IRON

SUCH music wakes each naked bough,
Wild heart in the soft country,
That buds mouth secrets to the sough
Of winds, tasting of sap; and now
Earth's deeps are here to see!

But O, wild heart, earth cannot break
Its life into your sleep,
Nor shed your grace for Autumn's sake—
For seasonless as any lake,
Your lovely lustres keep;

And yet some pruner comes and clips
The shoots of a soft country;
O God, these very deeds eclipse
Our stars, our woods, and with their ships
Beauty is wrecked on the sea.

THE ISLAND DEAD OF INCHIGOILL

ON the blue road through Moytura
I heard from cairns overthrown
Stone cutters ringing the Gospels
On crosses of fiery stone,
For saints grown quiet in granite
Carven with sunless hoods,
While men wielded flighty axes
That buried sharp light in woods.

Come, woodmen, O sweet strings quicken
On harps strange women made
So flawlessly from green salleys,
That shadowed a heron's wade;
These murmur still of rich waters,
Lost woods and the healing of sleep
From grasses in arable holdings,
From stills making music leap!

Wild light from crown and red crozier
Is quenched now in holy Cong;
No king takes sleep from grey poteen,
And leaner than a church song
The bishop in pure black ashes
Lies in a place of wakes—
Their white pipes strewn on the tombstones
Of drownings in Galway lakes.

So, woodmen, tune up! and stone cutters
You quicken your silvern notes,
Although not one yellow coffin
Is due for the funeral boats;
We've lost all our beautiful faces,
Moytura has taken its fill,
Those acres of dark lake water
Bore harvest for Inchigoill.

“EVENS ON PEGASUS”

GATHERED in the grey mouth of morning
Men came from the course and bull-ring—
Bending boughs for the drinking tents,
On spear grass hard by the sea.

“ Evens on the field, I’ll give here,
With dragons hooked on sovereigns;
Go win and wet your whistles
In a brew for bearded chins.”

I ceased and cleared my throttle
(Then hoarser than a cuckoo’s)
With the secrets of a golden still
From Nephin’s brambled dew;

When a strange man came and gambled—
Fingers tricked lights from a pile
Of silver pence, only ciphered
In a fresh Sahara isle.

What a circus horse he mounted!
One roped from the Galway pound
Neighing, sidling as if its head
By the wind was bridle-bound.

So away raced the bare-backed riders,
Haunches springing from the cane;
Knee-gripping bare-backed riders
Clutched to each lashing mane—

Till the soft earth rose in hoof-fulls
Through the moist air like birds,
From the man who put strong poetry
On every form but words.

What? His horse won most unfairly!
It flung wings out; and grew proud
Kicking white hoofs on that banked air—
Then cantered through a cloud;

Leaving one to learn with the evening
How men from the bull-ring and course
Must never pile wild money
On a winged and feathered horse.

CELEBRATIONS

FROM Scarva's grassy baronies,
Where surly people lay,
I wandered in a Scarva dawn
And met the sun half way
Across a crush of little hills,
While morning silence lay
With sleep behind those blinded panes,
That honour no saint's day.

But pulsing through those distant hills
Dawn heard a lonely drum,
Until each hidden sunny glen
Echoed a fierce tom-tom,
As mountain blood sprung to the march;
O tongues be dumb in Rome,
Through bushy mouths of many a glen
The Orange drummers come!

White Patric herded in those hills,
While Columb propped their fruit;
And now the gentle psalms are still,
The belling tongues are mute
Upon the ears of bannered men,
Whose tempers only suit
Raw music on barbaric drums,
The whinings of a flute!

Wild sashes through the field day flash
Dark features from the Boyne;
Their Orange drums are caned in blood
And savage factions join
In drunken fealty to the crown
That's bearded on their coin—
While our lost crown sends flighty dreams
Across the sleepy Boyne!

Great talk has crowded out each tent,
There's not a drink to spare;
So marshal up, you Scarva men,
And trudge home to your care,
Where work is done by me and mine,
Who stocked your hiring fair; . . .
The weary drums are muffling in
Each glen of evening air.

A SHADE FROM LIMESTONE

WHILE blood ran wild, for her he drew
White yewan wood and stone;
And where the yewan wood was planed,
The limestone married loam,
Rearing an airy house for her,
With copings cleanly shown,
Against the air from Galway,
As cool tunes of stone.

Such graceful tones have rarely paired
On floors of mirrored stone,
As when those floors with her assumed
The shine of sun on moon—
Those courtesies on borrowed lights,
That shone from her and were
Embroideries in marble
And lace spun of air!

What wind has blown those lights away
And shorn the polished stone,
Among a storm of thorn-boughs;
Where broken years have grown
To less than her grave gentleness;
And yet the books declare:
*His dream survives and shelters
That tenant of air.*

A TINKER'S WOMAN

I'LL throw no sorrowful hair at her—
No tears for you, MacDara,
For pride of beauty takes no slur
When fierce of limb, MacDara;
You thought my body's shine grew dusk
Beside that girl you took at Lusk—
*Yet who but a fool would pluck the husk
And leave the fruit to wither.*

You now forget when from the gorse
I saw you swim sea water,
Stark naked I flashed on a tinker's horse
Down to the morning water
And into green seas I took my ride
Barebacked, horse-swimming I reached your side,
*Then who but a fool would rob the tide
And throw away the salmon.*

Ah, now I know you wrongly thought
You loved me then, MacDara,
While peeled to the waist for me you fought
Some mountainy fellow, MacDara,
For there on wet grass and stript to my teeth
I seemed as a sword of light at your feet—
*Yet who but a fool would keep the sheath
And leave the sword unhandled.*

So now I'll throw no curse before
Your lean ways with young women,
For I'm too ripe in the old sun's lore
To envy slips of women;
Then keep the girlish slip who went
To whet your taste, last night in my tent,
*For who but a fool would look for scent
Along a budless bramble.*

A DEAD CRAFTSMAN

THE soft glen, heavy with evening,
Is still in unbroken dew—
No paleness is brushed on the grasses,
No crush from his shoe
Is trailed through the airy passes—
Where only a moon moves now
Crushing the dusk through wet grasses,
And dusk in his brow!

That moon stood barely a stripling
Of half a twilight old,
When he found me in dreamy houses
Near the wood's blue threshold;
But while he smiled in that twilight
(His dark head slanting bird-wise
To stringed musics heard through my fingers)
Sleep grew on his eyes.

Sleep strained from his mind the beauty
Seen from his cunning hand;
And under the quiet veilings
Of a sleeping land
He moves now, unseen with the dew-time,
Unknown to the yellow clay,
In ways of the rainy willows
To dawn on a strange day!

THE TEMPTED HERMIT

O, FACE in tears, whose griefs to beauty grew—
Before whose beauty swift winds gasp and cease,
Ah, pity me who wore a thin path to
Your lone house, grassed in peace.

Have you not held me here by secret strings,
By strings more delicate than shining tears?
Then look on me, the weakest of weak things,
And ease my unknown fears;

For someone calls me while the blue sky hurls
Against this window-pane, where look! she peers;
Her eyelids hold the dews of other worlds—
Lost sweetness woos my ears!

Ah, Lady, save me, save me from her looks;
And through your candlelight, O soothe my mind,
Before it breaks and scatters with the rooks,
Along dawn's empty wind.

THE FLIGHT OF HORSES

OVER the stalk-crashing marshes,
From red timber and slim pine,
Herds of the wild black horses
Flash into open sunshine
Breasting wet light; where flighty
Black mares from a savage breed,
Dash to the whinnying canter—
Their wild manes leashed with speed!

Where the wide Curragh lifts no clinging
For the wind over grassy miles,
Low paddocks choke with the forage
Of foals from uncropped isles—
Foals tethered by some lean dealers
Grown swift on milk of the mare—
Fillies and colts from those horses
Of larch hills, curbed to the fair.

For all the rare stallions harnessed,
Who knows but the last flaming shoe
On the anvil, chills into silence?
While over our hills the few
Remaining horses lose shelter—
Tails lashing bare haunches and backs—
As the sun strikes in golden laughter
Boughs toppling over the axe.

These timbers lie clear for the iron
That runs from this stony place;
While over moon-drenching orchards,
Just shadowy horses chase
From dreams once herded in fir-lands
And summers only known
Through shiny black seams of mining
Burning soft earth to the stone.

F E A R
(*To M—y*)

I SHALL not breathe your name;
The winds of green fields bear it,
On many a bush Spring signs it
More clearly after rain.

Nor should your face be seen,
For they may take you from me;
Then gently, most cautiously,
O blind each window-pane!

Yes, queerly in the two lights,
Between the stars and candle,
I hear chill music crying,
From tree to secret tree.

What of those earthy cryings?
Be calm, for the bush wood hedges
The chirping of those lonely strings,
No harp has ever caged!

Then nearer, love, and nearer,
White signature of Spring;
I'll think of you in still music,
I shall not breathe your name—

Thinking of what bright flood
Hushes a heart grown dark,
Forgetting the crush of dusk
That quenched a sunning lark!

So, lover, move with a soft tread;
O close out the heavy door,
For cautiously, most cautiously,
The Dead pass by outside.

AN OLD AIR

As I was walking I met a woman
And she side-saddled on a horse,
Most proudly riding the road to Moyrus
On a stallion worthy of a fine race-course.

The horse it sidled; I asked her kindly,
With a timid hand on the jolting rein,
“ Now are you Niamh or Grace O’Maille,
Or a female grandee from the fields of Spain? ”

She merely fondled those bridled fingers
And little fearing sweetly replied,
“ Among my people you’d grow so noble
That none would know you did here abide;

Then live with me, man, and I will give you
The run of twelve hills with a still in each.”
Her eyes were craving that rainy evening
While a gentle air was in her speech.

“ But O, my darling, who is your father?
X Ah, would your mother take kindly to me? ”
And then she told me, “ My folk ride over
The silver flowering of a green-lit sea.”

At those strange words then I did remember
Her folk they were of no good sort,
So I bid good evening to that young woman
And she took herself to the woods of Gort!

LAKE DWELLERS

HUSH, wordy one, hush!
No sound, no stir,
Not a bulrush
Sways on the water;
Not a wind haws
On pools, where dawn was
Plunged by an otter.

For mating time, I
Stocked in dull water
Boughs from the wild sky;
Stapling our dwelling,
With raw lime and larch—
Over that lake marsh,
Scared to the lapwing.

So, drowsy head, rest
Deep in those feathers—
Piled from some high nest
Of moulting wild geese—
Resting the bright head,
Shyly on our bed,
Quilted with peace.

While to those isles, grown
Heavy with dew-shine,

Thin woods have shown
In broken duskligh,
The sword-light of kerns
Float as twin herna,
Fording the swift night.

But shining love, sleep
Opens frail worlds—
The foolish fish leap
Through stars by our threshold
Breaking on curds
Of dew-light, where shore birds
Nod in the cold.

Ah, soon you shall sink
Through charms of slumber;
The rush candles wink,
Yet no shadow creeps;
No sound, no stir—
The gentle lake dweller
Sleeps. . . .

RED BARBARA

ALONG the airy tops of morning
I scaled a wandering mile;
And coming on a tremble of water
Slyly I watched awhile
Your nimble fingers building there—
Pile on sunny pile—
The silken architecture
Of your hair.

But since against your shining beauty,
My shadow stains the sun
Along the ways you set me awander;
And now I drift upon
The cold shore of each gleaming crowd—
Crowds I proudly shun,
To follow darkness for a
Fiery cloud;

Until upon the airy windings
Each morning finds me near
Your sunhouse, shining with soft women,
And with your voice I hear
Strings, laughing in a river of sound—
Strings, the old crones fear,
That ghostly fingers weave on
Moonlit ground.

Yet Barbara your shining body
 Storms from the cold clear air;
Your eagle blood still leads the horse herd
 Over the horse-dealers' fair;
And now for men of lost desire,
 Head of the evil hair,
Arise and shatter twilight
 With your fire.

THE UNKNOWN WOMAN'S SON

FOR years he tripped fife-music
Over each tidy floor,
Where shoes and music married,
As waves to a windy shore—
Till old heads swayed in a whisper,
“ He’s lipping too giddy a fife,
For stepping stones of dancing
Beneath a flighty wife.”

He lipped so giddy a music,
This unknown woman’s son—
He fided and shoes grew lighter
Until his fiding won
A sunny-moulded woman
And she danced to his play,
While farmers feared her dancing
Would run feet from the clay.

For miles I sought her movements,
For years I sought his tunes
Through tides of frozen grasses,
To the reaping of old moons;
And here I find him lolling
Silent on a stone;
But where is that sky-woman
Whom music made his own?

As one in the cripple of slumber,
He answered, as one beyond life:
“ I lipped too giddy a music
And coaxed too sly a fife,
Till I was led by my music
From my own love to prove
The blinding heights, with a woman
Of ways too loud for love.

“ Ah, none can tell my sky-woman
To what chill glooms I fell,
Through limbs of a flaming minute—
O drunken plunge to hell!
Too late to laud her sweetness,
Far better now for me
To cleanse my shame in silence
Upon a wholesome tree.”

A SHEILING OF THE MUSIC

VIOLINS are crying
Out across the water,
Through hazel and salley
And through soft rain they cry;
And no other stir,
But the yellow stir of rush-light
Touching that window
Cobwebbed by the sky.

With violins wheening
Inside that island sheiling,
I hear lost secrets breathing
Beyond the cairned mound;
And heedless of me waiting
Sean bends to his playing—
While hazel and salley
Drip grey light to the ground.

Surely now my love
Is stolen by the music;
O could I only steal him
With my heart's sigh
We could steep with those shadows
And leave the sheiling,
That winks through wet salleys
Its bleary eye.

Wearily veiling
The air in greys of evening,
Slow hush of darkness,
O ease my dreamy pain,
While violins wheening
Dreamily on water
Are waning, waning
Softly in rain. . . .

V A N I T Y

WITHIN my shining clay,
Could I conceive the beauty
That none could wear away
To dust and silver ashes;
Then no more in a twilight
I'd call on oaken air,
For mirror or candlelight
To build my powdered hair;
Nor would I gild my features
For any man's delight,
Who courtesies and passes
The lace of Limerick glasses,
Shaped to a frozen light.
For pregnant with pure beauty,
No more I'd gild the way
Of dust and silver ashes,
With my own shining clay.

THE INN OF THE DEAD MEN

As the grey air grows darker on grass-hidden water
And black otters bark at the talking of starlings,
We've walked, O my darling, so far through the valley
That shadows are quenching each star.

Here even, my dearest, earth trembles in stillness;
And between hill and weir and the green breadth of
 mearings
Lean death makes a clearing, while nearer the hearth-
 stone
The child leaves the sweet breast in fear.

In the silence Time dies here beside the dim windows
Of this inn that spies on miles to a blind glen;
O, quit then, while light winds are clipped from the
 pinelands,
This inn of the lone keeners' cry.

To that long home in turn we must go, O my lover,
Where crones from their churning shall know your
 white shoulder
And golden curls worm round the bone; but before
 then
May many suns quern the last corn.

EMIGRATION

Now as the lees of stray stars
Ebb from those salt grey sands,
Shy beauties shawled on sidecars,
Gallop from stony townlands—
Passing those lonely thresholds,
Lit by a wave of hands:
Leaving the quiet to murmur
The rumours of rich lands.

For them the sails are well spread
Towards far wastes of stone,
Where joy is choked by small bread
And worn is each fair bone
Once curved to a neat delight,
On roads where the dance is known;
But the light steps are muffled,
Now the wild limbs have flown.

And yet you strive to leave here;
Come, love, take my hand,
We'll thrive where still the red deer
Runs on the green highland,
Taking our space of sunlight,
Until in the dark below,
Under the growth of moonlight
Bright isles of water grow.

OFFERINGS

I GAVE you love, fair Diarmuid,
And more than love, my lover,
Before you gave your lovely mouth
To the grey mouth of the sea.
Now what are tears to give you,
No tears can ease my sorrow,
Nor soothe your death, fair Diarmuid,
Now touched by the dull sea;
And so no wakers burn
The holiness of candles,
The grey dew steeps no flowers
For you with holy clay;
But, Diarmuid, here I give you,
In Saint MacDara's island,
This kernel of my body,
That's withered with my sighs!

THE FLOWERING SLOE

It's lately I'm captivated by a handsome young blade,
And daily complaining for my own darling lad;
O, I'm daily complaining, as a babe to the breast,
For this darling young lad who has broken my rest.

My darling walks by with lace at each hand,
In shoes of dim buckles, O watch my love stand;
At bull-ring or races he makes the best show,
While his beauty makes light of the flowering sloe.

At a bough of the sloe bush I first saw his face—
At a bough of the sloe bush I vowed my heart his;
But the Queen of Sahara, his sister did say,
Was asking my darling for to love, sport and play.

I'd rather to have my darling for love, sport and play,
Than to watch the thorn blossom on a dark winter's
day;
And 'though my kin close me in this babby-house,
Still I'll see on the sloe all the grace of a spouse.

Were my love just to take me to Mount Nephin's
grass,
Where deep brambles gather low clouds as they pass,
We could dream in those twilights of June's timid glow,
While sheltering beneath the white flowering sloe.

THE WANDERING HAWK

No golden coin lit that brown fist
Like a goldsmith's forge, since you came
To my yellow hearth, with hounds at your wrist
And bangles of hard flame;
Nor have I seen, since you braved my door
From herding by salt water,
One prouder bird on this yewan floor—
Ah, Sea-rogue O'Bruadir's daughter.

Yet all the worth you've got from me
Would gild a tinker's dream,
With amber locked in a frozen sea
And gold skimmed from a seam
Of evening on long, hilly dew—
Such wealth you'll only quarter
From one, whose minted words ring true
For Sea-rogue O Bruadir's daughter!

This house of granite flames in gems
When doors let in the East;
Its evening walls have sleepy panes
To hold the burning West;
Here cream is dashed to wear a crown
And Autumn's dream on water
Has borne remembered honey down
To please O'Bruadir's daughter.

Once island queens drank to my fill;
But leaving their soft talk,
Your poet worked in birdlime, till
He caged a Connacht hawk
With golden eyes on mountain game—
She's poisoning since I caught her;
But you're a bird I cannot tame,
Ah, Sea-rogue O'Bruadir's daughter!

ALL SOULS' EVE

THE grey air was thinning
Over the red lake,
Shading pale herons
Scarcely awake;
Until on still grasses,
On shores of cold dew,
The bright ring of sunset
More brightly grew.

Then mooring my curragh
In yew trees awhile,
I crushed through the wet dusk
Of a deep isle;
And cleaving boughs over
One moonless place,
I stood in the pale light
Of a pale face.

That face it moved gently
As dew on the air;
"O come," she said softly,
Her eyes told me where;
Her words they grew dreamy,
Her voice gave no fear—
The voice of my true love
Dead for a year!

I loosened my curragh
From a yew bough,
Surrounded by music—
I scarcely hear now
Away on grey waters,
Away on the lake,
And half of my senses
Barely awake.

POACHERS

ALTHOUGH each Galway wood
Has been our bed
Of marriage this many a year,
Here come let us spread
Rushes again for love,
Housing from eyes outside,
Where netting the sea's live glitter
Those salmon poachers hide.

Bright love, from the waters of dew
I have moved to this night
Wilder in sport than poachers—
Whose draw-nets gathering light
Into a shivering pile,
Heap treasures on the shore—
While rushes net you, my treasure
Isled on my rush floor.

Then what thin sign of a moon
Curled in the leap
Of a sea-ripened salmon,
Shall tempt me out to reap
That silver flowing far over
Those shoals in the warm deep?
While we in a breathless dark
Grow empty of sleep.

So here as a poacher I'll gather
Your body's white gleam;
For too soon rushes wither
And in a cold dream
Now cuckoos stir and the close night
On our window has gone;
O, quickly rise up, my bright love,
And quench the dawn!

LOST ROADS

AH, scarcely a green star wades
From Tara top,
When road men hone their spades
And claw hammers drop:
Sparking that soft air, lit with
quick silver, as a swift dips there.

So breaking the sod and stone,
Road men were seen
By young butter women, grown
Light heeled between
Leix man and Meath man—hill-bent
that morning, where five roads began.

Since then; upon those sound roads
(Brambling through perils)
Coaches of noble modes
Ran with flighty earls,
Who left to wine-fights, rakes in their
falling halls of lost delights.

Their full woods were creeping to
Roads, ever wet,
Out from close evening dew
Of no stir; and yet
Lean years did release shipfuls of hunger
after the Wild Geese.

And so where the bare hill rounds
Now no roads pass;
But turned to grey mounds
With years of starved grass
Those piles of stone lie, preened for
pale ages by a wind's lean sky.

A FEAST OF THE QUILTING

BEFORE Wednesday of black fasting, O woman,
You promised we two would wed,
And through lean days to the Passion, in that time
We'd know each other, you said;
Then over the threshold to ale I took you,
Together our hands gripped light,
Drinking brave health to the marriage we settled
In brews of last summer's bite.

There were words of praise from many relations,
Your mother spoke kindly to me
Of staying the marriage till days of the flaxing;
Then with her I did agree,
But the far light ebbed so early that evening,
So quiet the sea-mist grew
On my one fresh acre oozing with young ale,
It was sorrow I only knew.

In our salt grass, time of lambing was over,
Scutched flax lay steeped in each linn
To bleach in the warmer days, for the grassing;
And there with the harvest piled in,
Flower women hooped new summers through linen,
As needles plied scarlet and green;
So it's now, O love, our marrying season,
And your quilting frames are seen!

Ah, your mother spreads no feast for my quilting;
Sweet melodeons harry her floor,
New ale is cupped but not of my cropping,
And I outside your cold door
Hearing your bridegroom drink to the quilting
Of love grown proud from my praise,
That gave to your features those beautiful graces
Of the Mass on holy days!

SWORD - MAKERS

It is the little quiet of our fields
That you are needing,
Within the mearings of our termon lands;
It is our woods, too heavy for bird singing,
Shall bring you healing,
With sleeping waters for your stricken hands.

Ah, worn-out kerns among the harried glens,
Here none can follow
Your feet through doors, where refuge is allowed;
Although the grey hawk hangs upon a taut wing,
He broods no sorrow,
With sunlight preening through an evening cloud.

But while the hills are elbowing swift moonlight
Into our smithy,
Our anvils temper swords of colder ray;
And these, O kerns in healing, let us whisper,
We sell for pity;
Then buy these holy swords,
And steal away.

THE GHOST

AH, Auina Costello,
Although I have known
The soft shores of heaven
And hell's cold stone,
Earth-tainted I mingle
With airs we knew
And break in blue trembles
Of night, on you.

In these fruit-tree spaces,
Wet airs cry to-night;
Cries stripping salt branches
Smelt in moonlight,
Of windy fresh leavings
From every harsh tree—
Braced with salt tastings
Of a heard sea.

These boughs drop their voices;
Now this still place,
O, Auina Costello,
And your lone face
Refashions the lost earth
My song once knew,
Drenched in a soft West,
Illumed by you.

Still you keep our trysting,
 Knowing how I
Am now in a pale wave
 Of island sky;
Here stript to my dreamings,
 Beyond death I am
The fierce breath of Tauris,
 The hoof lust of Ram!

Hush, woman; no murmur,
 Though moonlight endows,
Yet stints, windy silver
 On black fruit-boughs;
No murmur, no sorrow,
 While Time ebbing by,
Flickers false moon-dials
 With a swift sky.

MAIRE OF MAGDALA

IN this place of little stone hills
The trees cry and I hear
Seas whitening on moon-flat granite,
With a taste of the rising year
Flung on those marsh birds talking
Of things in the rain-washed air—
The hunger of wings for summer
With the lone reindeer.

Hill-wise on a bird's way the half-light
Walks swiftly through gappy crab-trees;
And netted in this lost brightness
A woman in Galway frieze—
Pale featured and yellow headed
Smelling of eastern seas—
Smiles and the lonely graces
On the dark thoughts arise.

These crab-trees shoot out their wild branches;
And the unpruned ways sprung behind
Her eyes (pooled in nuggets and quivered
To fire by each perilous wind)
Still shoot from wild days in Magdala—
Ways lopped by her gentle Friend,
When she heard the young summer crying
Through the marsh bird's mind.

She of the many strong lovers,
She who now snares me to her,
O would she could hold me to true love—
For see as she wanders from here,
Through the oyster pools our blue evening
Wades by the crane and the stare
And away, for the Great Bear goes climbing
The rain-washed air.

A P L E A

*Come, poets, hear the flails ; bright grain is leaping
In your stone homes where old men slept in flowers ;
Although the harps are still and wine is out,
I have a lip of wine to heal all drought
Beneath the glitter of this laughing goblet,
That Patric netted from the salmon's mouth.*

*For I'm more youthful than the youth of Fintan,
More beautiful than any grace in Deirdre,
And even Aoife never rivalled me
With tides of riches, gathered after she
Became the crane, that hid within her crane skin
The winking jewels of a morning sea.*

*Then rise and taste this red wine ; strings are chirping !
And from my wild lip take each tidal treasure—
That tides, too full below the crane's grey skin,
Have washed with music through the harp of Finn,
Whose tunes, too seldom heard where bells are noisy,
Are hidden in me till the strings begin !*

*Look up ! the hounds are out and swift black horses
Have stript new glens and hoofed the mountain grasses,
Chasing slow daylight over Muckish Mor ;
Until quick stars seem javelins to the boar
And distant lakes are stepping-stones of moonlight
Across the darkness to the first grey shore.*

*These are no goblet dreams, sung by three voices—
That laughing string, these strings of tears and slumber ;
Then, poets, sing, before my wine is gone ;
O poets, you in whom my beauty shone,
Come flush me with new praise, for I am Ireland,
Grown old and ashen with a touch of dawn !*

NOTES

THE racial strength of a Gaelic aristocratic mind—with its vigorous colouring and hard emotion—is easily recognised in Irish poetry, by those acquainted with the literature of our own people. Like our Gaelic stock, its poetry is sun-bred; twilight for it is just the tremulous smoke of one day's fire. Not with dreams but with fire in the mind, the eyes of Gaelic poetry reflect a richness of life and the intensity of a dark people, still part of our landscape. Many qualities from such an ancestry may easily be detected in the poetry of younger Irish writers, who are working to-day in homely materials.

The younger poets generally express themselves through idioms taken from Gaelic speech; they impose on English verse the rhythm of a gapped music, and through their music we hear echoes of secret harmonies and the sweet twists still turning to-day through many a quaint Connacht song. For indeed these poets, in the lineage of the Gaelic, produce in Irish lyric—with its exuberance and wild delicacy—the memories of an ancient and rigorous technique. And yet it may be finally said that poetry forages no groundsel in a gilded cage, but having clamped the sod with a shoeless hoof, cleaves the wild air with liberal wings.

Page 1. *A Petition*. Gran Uaile, or Grace O'Maille, was a famous female sea rover, who commanded

extensive free-booting along the western seaboard. Her main base was at Clew Bay, where she liberally contributed to the support of the Abbey at Mur-risk. The ballad-makers used "Gran Uaile" as a secret name for Ireland.

Page 2. *The Dark Breed*. One of the methods adopted by the landless tenants in Connacht as a protest against the idleness of the fields, during the agrarian trouble, was that of forcibly driving the cattle from the grazing lands of boycotted landlords. Rigorous deeds were often committed by the agitators; and as their operations were generally carried out by night, those engaged in the work were referred to as "moonlighters"; they were also named "the men with the hazel," owing to their frequent use of that stick—hence some references in this poem.

Page 13. *Hermits*. Cellach was an Irish saint of the sixth century who made his hermitage on a little island in Lough Conn, Co. Mayo. He composed a Hymn to the Dawn, in a style anticipating the Franciscan flavour, as he lay bound in a tree trunk, awaiting his death at the treacherous hands of King Guaire of Connacht.

Page 19. *The Island Dead of Inchigoill*. Inchigoill is a deeply wooded island in Lough Corrib, fronting the old monastic village of Cong. This island, which contained the Church of the Fair Stranger, was the burial-place of local saints, clerics, and kings; certain families on the mainland had the privilege, until recently, of interment on the island; but now its earth is too fully occupied, and only smoking pipes

of white clay, as respect to the dead, mark a few graves of to-day. Moytura, a townland convenient to Cong, was the scene of a fierce battle between the Tuatha de Danann and the Firbolg in pre-Christian times; cairn mounds to the fallen may still be seen on the battle-ground.

Page 57. *A Feast of the Quilting*. In parts of Ireland the prospects and arrangements of marriage are frequently considered after the flax harvest when the opportunities for such traffic are generally more favoured in the evenings, while most of the female neighbours are gathered together in one house for quilt making. Such gatherings, locally called "quilt-ings," only disperse with a general feast of merry-making, after the quilts—hand woven on large frames—are completed for the household. It may be assumed that such gatherings are, indeed, the survival of forgotten marriage rites.

Page 59. *Sword-Makers*. During the various campaigns in Ireland, ending with the Flight of the Earls, monasteries and other clerical institutions were frequently used by the Irish soldiery as places of refuge—and indeed the sanctuary afforded on these "termon" or church lands was generally recognised by the pursuing forces. However, within this atmosphere of peace and quietude a brisk trade was conducted, it has been assumed, in the making and selling of swords. A memory of this traffic is still found in the countryside.

Page 64. *A Plea*. Some allusions in this retrospective

poem are derived from Ossianic sources and from incidents in the Fenian saga. One of these incidents concerns the loss of Caoilte's goblet: according to an old bard, that brilliant jewel fell from the hero's fingers into a pool of great depth, and its recovery was only possible with the coming of Christianity, when eventually it was recovered by Saint Patrick through the aid of a salmon. Further use is made of an old poem regarding the magical transformation of Aoife into the form of a crane, condemned to spend a bitter life upon sea water; after its death, Mananaun of the Sea took the skin of that crane for a treasure bag, and with him its glittering contents were increased by each heaping of the tide.

Fintan was a very remote figure in Irish mythology, who, having passed through many incarnations, is recorded to have made his appearance again in Ireland centuries after the Christian era, when he was accepted as an authority on matters of pre-historic accuracy.

The harp of Finn held three strings capable of producing on all hearers sorrow, smiles, or slumber at its player's will.



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